

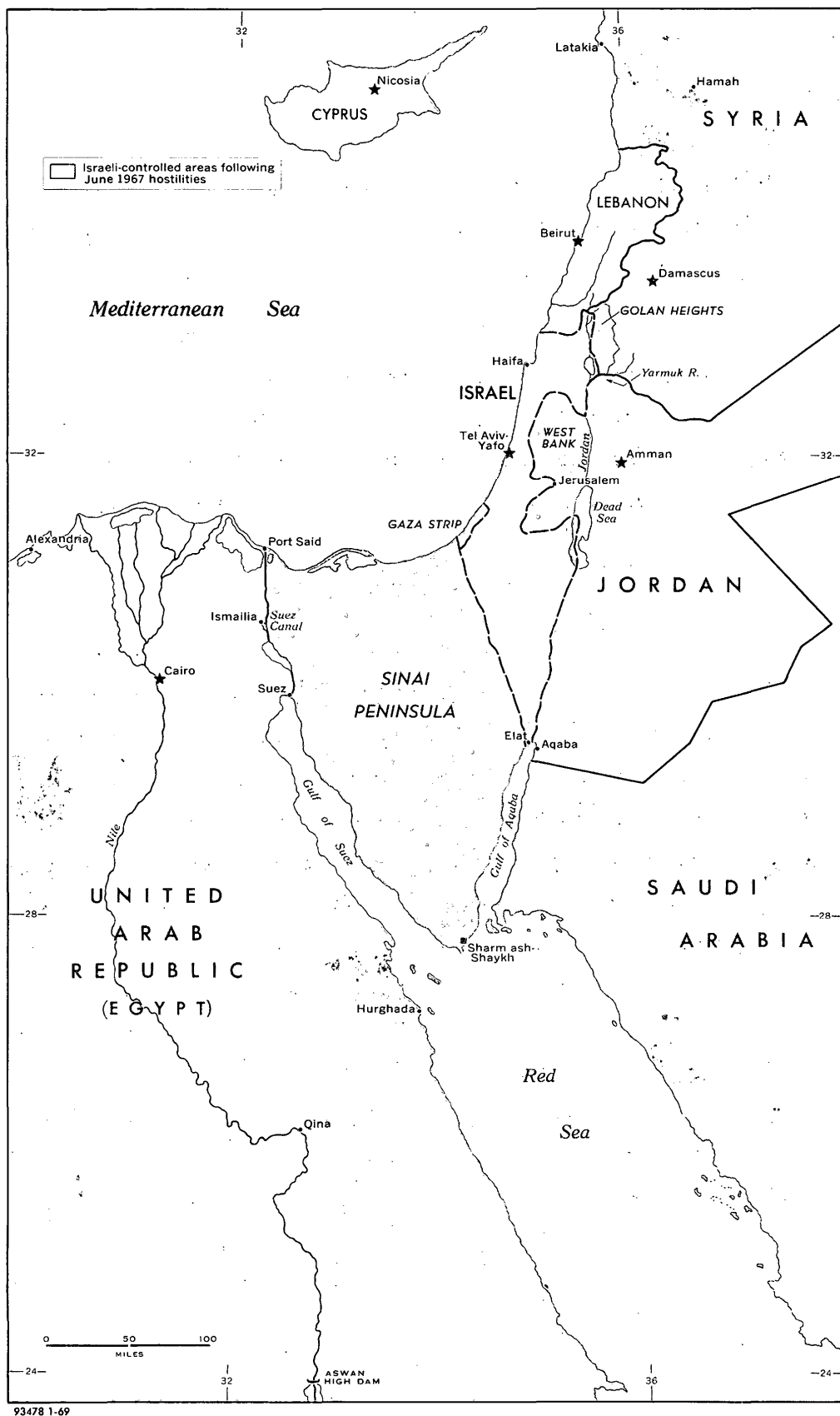
The President's Daily Brief

2 March 1969

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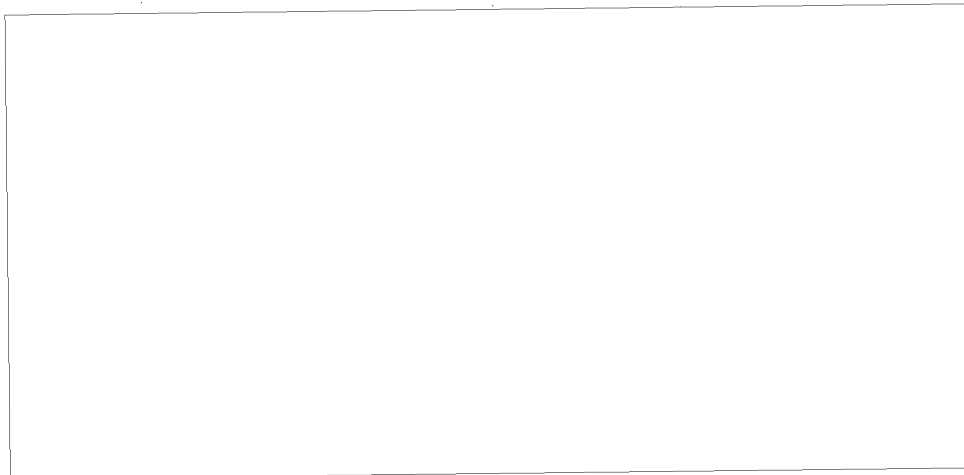
I. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

MIDDLE EAST

The picture of what has been going on inside Syria during the past two days is blurred. It is reasonably certain, however, that the Defense Minister, Hafiz A'sad, moved on 28 February to take full control of the government. Reports from neighboring countries indicate that he has not yet encountered serious resistance, but it is by no means clear that the coup is a complete success. Although a member of the so-called radical Baathist Party, which has ruled Syria since 1966, he is counted less doctrinaire than most of the men he is trying to oust. He is reported to favor bringing Syria into closer alignment with the other Arab countries in the interest of developing a common anti-Israeli policy. He seems also to favor keeping the Communist Party of Syria at arms length and reducing his country's dependence on Soviet military aid.

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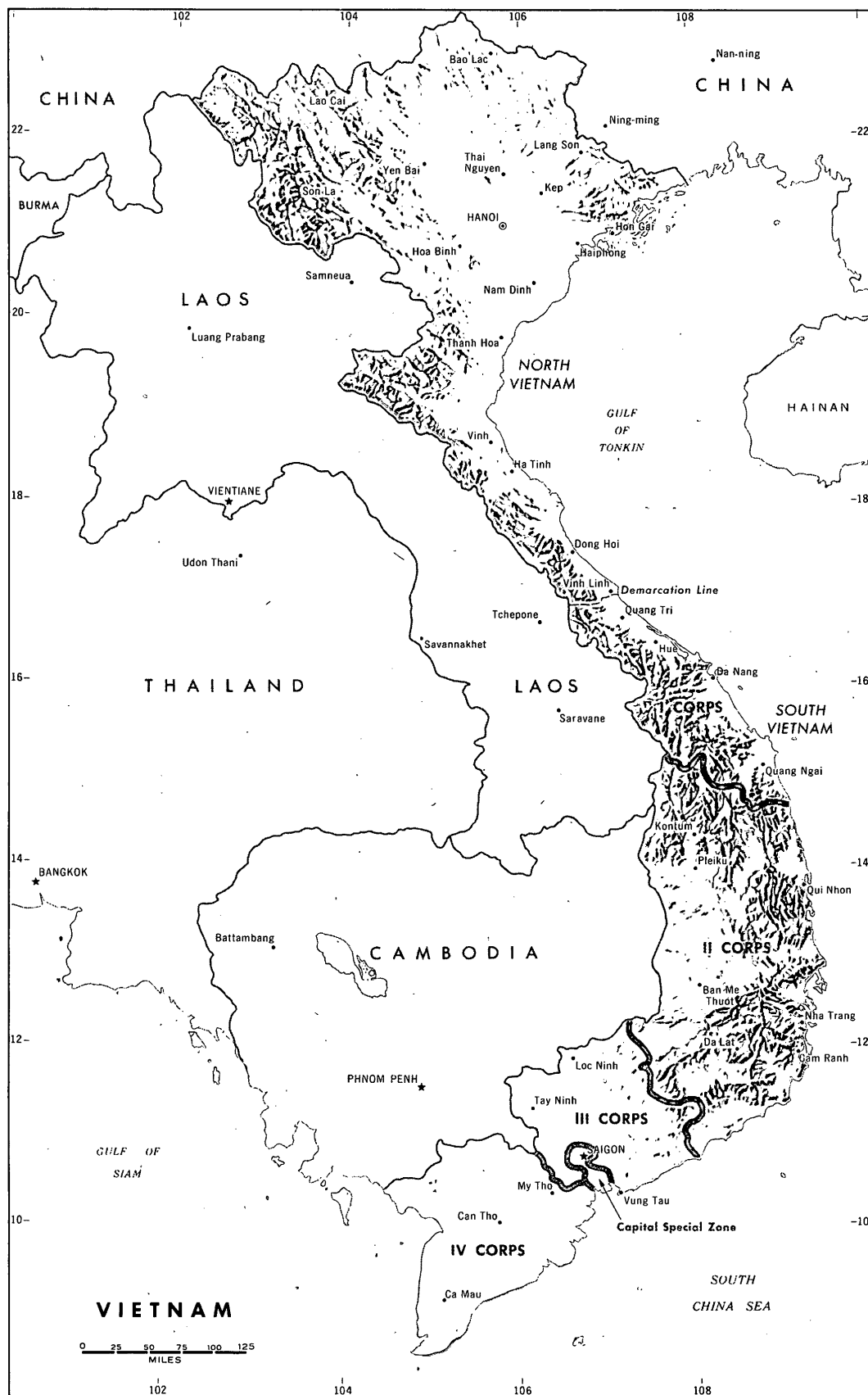
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SOVIET AFFAIRS

There were intermittent delays of traffic moving to and from West Berlin during the past 24 hours, including one total closure of the major access route to the city between 1 AM and 3 AM yesterday. Backups at the checkpoints appear to have been due both to heavy weekend traffic and a slow-down in processing by the East Germans.

A meeting yesterday between Chancellor Kiesinger and Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin brought no results. In a television report on the meeting, Kiesinger said "there was no possibility of reaching an understanding" on the question of the site of the Federal Assembly, and that the assembly therefore will convene in West Berlin on 5 March. He said he had also rejected Soviet charges that military goods were being manufactured in West Berlin. Kiesinger stated the West Germans will be better able because of President Nixon's recent reaffirmation of America's commitments to stand up to the "war of nerves" which can be expected in coming days.

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Soviet military units continue to deploy to exercise areas between Berlin and the West German border, and, apparently, to positions astride the Berlin-Helmstedt autobahn. Large numbers of Soviet tanks, trucks, and other vehicles were seen in the woods along the highway on 28 February and 1 March. The situation in the Berlin (air) Control Zone and air corridors has thus far remained quiet.

VIETNAM

Enemy activity declined further during the past 24 hours. Most of this activity occurred in III Corps. There were two terrorist incidents in Saigon, and a small enemy force attacked the outskirts of An Loc, the capital of Binh Long Province. There was little enemy action in I Corps, and Hue and Da Nang were quiet. In II Corps, fewer incidents of enemy shelling were reported than on any day since the offensive began. Sporadic mortar fire was directed against scattered allied military bases in IV Corps.

Prisoners in I Corps have reported that the second round of the offensive will open on 2 March.

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Attacks could, in any event, come at any time because of the proximity of the enemy's main force units to major objectives.

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II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

LAOS

The important government guerrilla base of Na Khang in northeastern Laos has fallen. North Vietnamese troops, believed to number about 1,000, attacked and seized outlying defensive positions early on 1 March. The US Air Force Tactical Air Navigation (TACAN) installation nearby was also captured. Enemy assaults on the main base continued into the night, finally forcing the defenders--who numbered 600 at the outset--to withdraw.

Loss of this base is a serious setback to the pro-government guerrilla operations in northern Laos. There will also be some impairment of air navigation through the loss of the TACAN facility, but no severe disruption of US air operations.

The military situation elsewhere in northern Laos remains quiet.

CHILE

The Annex discusses the important congressional election in Chile today.

CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS IN CHILE

The results of the congressional elections to be held in Chile today will have an important influence on the development of the campaign for the presidential election in 1970, particularly in the formation of a coalition of the far left. Chile's large Communist Party and its rival, the even more extremist Socialist Party, together have the highest vote-getting strength of any Marxist parties in Latin America and will play important roles in both elections. In fact, Chile is the only Latin American country where a Communist-dominated coalition has a reasonable chance of winning a free presidential election.

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The Elections

Many of the electoral contests--for 30 of the 50 Senate seats and all 150 seats in the Chamber of Deputies--will be decided more on the basis of local issues and personalities than on national politics. Because of Chile's complicated proportional representation system, the percentage of the popular vote received will not be directly reflected in the make-up of Congress. For example, in the last congressional elections in 1965 the Christian Democratic Party (PDC) received 42.3 percent of the popular vote, but obtained an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

Some races have assumed national importance because the candidates are mentioned as presidential nominees. In particular, the Tenth Senatorial District could have an important

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impact on the presidential race as three presidential hopefuls--Socialist Salvador Allende, Popular Socialist Raul Ampuero, and Christian Democrat Juan Hamilton--are among the contenders for the five Senate seats.

Political Situation

The choices to be made in the election will demonstrate the strengths not only of the five major parties but also of the competing factions within them.

Of particular interest is President Frei's Christian Democratic Party, in which a vocal leftist faction advocates cooperation with the Communists in the presidential election. Factionalism plus the problems of any incumbent party in off-year elections make it unlikely that the PDC can approach its 1965 percentage. To maintain its position as the country's dominant party, however, it hopes to obtain about a third of the vote. Frei hopes for a strong showing by PDC moderates that will weaken the leftists' position at the party congress to be held a few months after the elections. Since that meeting will set the tone for the presidential campaign, and may also choose the nominee, the congressional election results could be crucial for the future direction of the party.

Other political groups have equally important interests at stake. The Socialist Party is engaged in a bitter battle with its breakaway faction, the Popular Socialist Union. This strife is almost certain to decrease the total Socialist vote, which in the last congressional election was ten percent. If

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pro-Castro Socialist Senator Allende wins a large victory, he would have a good chance for the nomination, for the third time, of the Communist-Socialist Popular Action Front. It would be Allende's fourth try for the presidency.

The conservative National Party, which was formed in 1966 from two traditional parties after their serious defeat in the congressional elections of 1965, may profit from a general feeling of uncertainty in the electorate. The pace of reform in recent years, too slow for many leftists, has at the same time upset some members of the middle class. Although some National Party candidates suffer from political inexperience, and the party lacks organization and a popular base, it could emerge as the second-largest vote-getter. It may derive some support from followers of former president Jorge Alessandri, whom the Nationals openly favor for the presidency. As an independent the 72-year-old Alessandri has been careful to dissociate himself from partisan activities.

The Radical Party, a traditional middle-class group, has lately been led by people who see the party's future tied to that of the Communists. Although the Communist Party has not spurned Radical advances, it might be reluctant to support a "bourgeois" Radical presidential candidate if its more militant Socialist allies did not follow its lead. Indeed, the Radicals' national organization has been so fragmented by factionalism that if the party did make a strong showing it might not have the unity of leadership necessary to consolidate its gains.

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The Communists themselves have the strongest organization of any of the parties and should improve on the 12 percent of the vote they received in 1965. Because the Communist Party can deliver its vote virtually intact to the presidential candidate it supports, the Socialists, Radicals, and part of the PDC are courting it assiduously. Its support could be decisive in a close race.

Consequences

If the Communists, Socialists, and Radicals can agree on one candidate, he would be a strong contender in the presidential race next year. A strong showing by the Christian Democrats, particularly the moderates, will improve Frei's hand at the PDC congress and give the party strong momentum for the presidential race. A strong showing by the National Party would give Alessandri's campaign added momentum.

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